



The Cult of Lord Jagannath and its Impact on Oriya Literature

Indu Bhusan Kar

*"I ask not anything from you
O Jagannath, ask not for wealth or woman
But beg for small measure of Saradha Sands"*

Salabeg

Shri Jagannath, the Lord of the Universe is the presiding deity of Puri Jagannath temple which was constructed during the reign of Ananta Varma Chodagangadev (1078-1147 A.D.) of Ganga dynasty. If we trace the evolution of the Jagannath Consciousness, we find that Jagannath was originally the God of the *Sabara* - the aboriginal tribe. Lord Jagannath was treated as *Daru Devata* (*Daru Brahma*). Later on, the Jagannath Deity was established by the King of Orissa and worshipped as Lord of Universe. Many saints of Hindu, Buddhist, Jain philosophy even Muslim devotees found, their divine aspirations and dreams realized in the Jagannath cult. In Jagannath cult, we find the true manifestation of syncretic culture that is "unity in the diversity" which is a salient feature of Indian culture. Thus the cult of Jaganath took all-pervasive form, and assimilated various religious faiths like Saivism, Saktism, Vaishnavism, Jainism and Buddhism. The three images of Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra according to research scholars, represent the earliest religious Jain faith of Trinity - *Samyak Jnana*, *Samyak Charita* and *Samyak Drusti*. Some other scholars opined that these three images represent Buddhist triad of Budha, Dharma and Sangha.

Shankaracharya, one of the greatest saints of Hindu religion (788-822 AD) came to Puri and stayed there. He worshipped Lord Jagannath as Master of Universe. He composed heart-touching devotional song in Sanskrit titled - "*Jagannath Astakam*". The English version of 1st Stanza of this *Jagannath Astakam* - eulogizes Jagannath as Sree Krushna - The Master of Universe. His prayer begins - thus

*"Once you appeared in the woods.
On the banks of Kalindi
Dancing to the tune of the sweet consort
seeking nectar from the lotus faces of cowherd women.
Laxmi, Siva, Indra & Ganesh
O Lord, the Master of the Universe appear in my vision".*

After Shankaracharya, many other religious saints such as Ramanuja, Chaitanya, Nimbark and Nanaka visited Puri and worshipped Lord Jagannath as God - (*Param Brahma*). Jayadev the follower and devotee of Nimbark sect and a celebrated saint poet of 12th Century who wrote *Gitagovinda* worshipped Lord Jagannath as Radhamadhab. Puri has been long since been treated as one of the *Chaturdham* - a sacred place of pilgrimage.

Sri Rama Krishna Paramhansa, the most honoured saint of India opined that Lord Jagannath is true Pantheon God - Epitome of "*Sarba Dharma Samnvaya*" The Cult of Jagannath has in course of time, faced all religious challenges and survived. It instilled ideals of religious fraternity, equality and universal



brotherhood among the millions and millions of devotees all over world. This is the oldest popular religious cult in Orissa. German scholars A. Eschmann, Dr. Herman Kulke and B.C. Tripathy, Director of Ganganath Jha Institute, Allahabad, had written jointly a well - documented book on evolution of Jagannath Icon titled "The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa". They have opined that Narasingha worship was the earlier form, worshipped mostly by Adivasis and gradually accepted by the kings of Orissa, even though some of them were Shaivites. The evidence of this evolutionary stage of iconography is found in the premises of Jagannath temple. The icon Nrusingha has been installed with Trisula of Shiva. In Orissa, well known research scholars like Dr. Beni Madhav Padhi, the author of "*Daru Debata*" and Dr. K.C. Misra, the author the "*The Cult of Jagannath*" have brought to light the genesis and ideal philosophy of syncretism of Oriya culture in their books.

It is heartening to note that, this all-pervading cult of Jagannath has greatly influenced all aspects of Oriya life and culture - Art, Dance, Drama, Music, Literature and Religion. Dr. Harekrushna Mahatab a great patriot, statesman, historian and writer aptly opined. "The Oriya society is the epitome of the Indian society. It has shown the most concrete way of syncretism to meet challenges. It was fortunate for the Oriya society to have Jagannath enshrined as political oneness for the state and religion was moving hand in hand, is those ages". ("This is cult of Jagannath" - an essay by Dr. Harekrushna Mahatab - published in "Image in Culture and Literature" 1977).

Oriya literature, beginning from the age of Sarala Dasa of 15th century to the 20th century, spanning nearly five hundred years has greatly been influenced by the consciousness of Lord

Jagannath. It is to be admitted that this Jagannath consciousness is ingrained in the minds of art loving Oriyas. That is why this land of Lord Jagannath though poor in economic wealth has been regarded as a peaceful holy land, free of violent communal clash and religious conflicts unlike other neighboring states. The cult of Jagannath has taught us religious tolerances and universal brotherhood. Our ancient as well modern literature, which have imbibed the great ideals of Jagannath cult of equality, fraternity and brotherhood have enriched Oriyas spiritual life and culture.

Impact of Cult of Jagannath on Oriya Literature :

If we survey the ancient and medieval Oriya literary works, we find innumerable instances and references of Lord Jagannath and His legends and glories. We get some references and rituals of worship of Lord Jagannath in *Madala Panji* (Drum-Chronicle of palm leaf manuscripts) supposed to have been started at the command of the first king of the Ganga-dynasty, Chodaganga Dev some time in the 11th - 12th century A.D.

Sarala Dasa, the saint poet of Oriya epic Mahabharat during the reign of Kapilendra Dev of 15th Century, first eulogized and prayed Lord Jagannath as "Srikrushna". This is found in every chapter of his epic work. He also adored Lord Jagannath as "Budha Avatara" in *Madhya Parva* of his *Oriya Mahabharat*. He has expressed his devotion to Lord Jagannath as follows :

*Bandai Sree Jaganath Baikuntha Nivas
Boudha rupe Nilagiri sikhe Achhibasi
Balabhadra Subhadra Sahite
Charirupe Bije Nilasundara Parvate*

(Mahabharat, Madhya Parva)

After Sarala Dasa, we find vivid description of worships and various *Veshas* of Lord



Jagannath in poetic works of many Oriya poets such as *Ramabivbha*, *Kalpalata* of poet Arjun Dasa, "*Gupta Geeta*", "*Laxmipurana*" of Balaram Das, *Niladri Satakam* (in Sanskrit), *Gundicha Bijee*, *Daru Brahmageeta* of Atibadi Jagannath Das, the author of *Oriya Srimad Bhagabat*.

During *Panchasakha* age, other *Panchasakha* poets of Oriya literature - Jasobanta, Achutananda and Ananta have also given vivid description of Lord Jagannath, His glory and grace in their poetic works.

Another Oriya poet Purusottam Das has written a historical poetry titled "*Kanchikaberi*" in which unflinching love between Lord Jagannath and milk-maid Manika - resembling consort Radha has been described in poetic heart touching and charming language. This poetry has also enriched folk literature of the Oriyas. Many ballads and *Suangas* were written on this theme of *Kanchikaberi*. This Jagannath cult also enriched Oriya *Bhajans* - lyrical devotional songs. Poetess Madhabi Das, Banamali Das and poets, Salabeg and Kabisurya Baladev Rath have written many *Bhajans* in praise of Lord Jagannath. Ramshakar Roy, a modern Oriya historical playwright wrote a full fledged drama titled "*Kanchi Kaberi*" in the year 1880, which was very much popular among the Oriya audience.

In the 17th century poet Loknath Bidyadhar wrote a very interesting poetry anthology named "*Niladree Mahotsav*" in which he portrayed various rituals and festivals relating to worship of Lord Jagannath. In the year 1820 another Oriya poet named Sri Gopinath Singh wrote a *Kabya* titled *Niladri Bihari* narrating the glory and grandeurs of different *Veshas* (costumes) of Lord Jagannath such as, *Sunavesha*, *Bali-Vamana Vesha*, *Kaliya Damana Vesha* and *Nagarjuna Vesha* etc.

During 18th and 19th century many celebrated Oriya poets like Bhima Bhoi - the Kandha Saint Poet, Dinakrushna Das author of *Rasakallola*, Purusottam Das, Poet of *Gundicha Bijay*. Judhistir Das, author of *Gundicha Yatra*, Baladeb Badajena - author Samar Tarang and *Gundnichia Vije* (in Hindi) enriched Oriya literature. Many Oriya ballads, *Bhajans*, *Suangas*, *Lilas*, *Jatras* and folk plays have got tremendous impetus and inspiration from many splendoured legends of the Holy Trinity - Jagannath, Balabhadra and Goddess Subhadra.

In 20th Century, Oriya poets, novelists and dramatists have also been inspired to write on noble ideals of Jagannath cult. The famous poem titled "*Puri Mandir*" of well known poet Kalindi Charan Panigrahi, the poems of Pandit Gopabandhu Das, some devotional poems of Radha Mohan Gadnayak and poetess Brahmotri Mohanty, have added to the enrichment of Oriya literature. The classic Oriya novel. '*Nilasaila*' (1968) written by eminent novelist Surendra Mohanty, which is a master piece on the theme of Lord Jagannath and his preservation at the critical juncture of foreign invasion. In his novel, Lord Jagannath is the main character during the invasion of Orissa by Takki Khan, when Ramachandra Dev was the king during 18th century. The frantic effort of king Ramachandra Dev to save Sri Jagannath Icon has been narrated in this novel. Surendra Mohanty the novelist has also written another popular novel title '*Niladri Vijay*' (1980) on the theme of Lord Jagannath and His legends. Some Oriya modern poets, novelist and dramatist have used legends of Jagannath, many colloquial Oriya words and idioms around Jagannath rituals in their literary works. Poets of *Anama Gosthi* started a movement on the theme of Lord Jagannath and Jagannath cult to make Oriya literature more popular. This was definitely a good sign of



homeward journey from abstract, absurd themes to simpler Oriya social cultural milieu. The spirituality behind Lord Jagannath legends and cults find echoes Oriya modern poetry and novels. It requires in the further indepth study.

Every year car festival is held in the month of Ashadha (June, July). On the day of car festival and Bahuda Yatra, when the wheels of Chariots *Nandighosa* (car of Jagannath), *Taladhwaja* (the car of Balabhadra) and *Darpadalana* (the car of Subhadra), roll on *Bada Danda*, the Grand road at Puri, thousands and thousands of devotees throat roar the jubilant cry - 'Jai Jagannath' clapping, singing melodious *Bhajans* in praise of Lord Jagannath. This is really a wonderful scene where devotees realize the spiritual bliss. In this

car festival people of all castes, creeds and religions visit Puri to have *darshan* of Lord Jagannath as He is treated as "God of People". In the words of Oriya celebrated poet Dr. Mayadhar Mansingh on the cult of Jagannath "As a symbol of Trinity (Balabhadra, Subhadra and Jagannath) is peculiarly significant with only two large eyes dominating the whole representation, each of the holy triad seems to become all - eye of the universe. His whole creation at one sweep and from whom nothing can be hidden in all the worlds".

The author resides at Plot 1595, Bhaktamadhu Nagar, Bhubaneswar.

GOVERNMENT OF ORISSA SIGNS MOU WITH POSCO OF SOUTH KOREA

The Orissa Government signed a Memorandum of Understanding with POSCO of South Korea for setting up of a 12 million tonnes per annum Integrated Steel Plant at Paradeep in Jagatsingpur district. The capacity of 12 million tonnes per annum will make the project not only the biggest in India but one of the biggest in the World. The project will be completed in two phases. Each phase will consist of two modules of 3 million tonnes per annum. The first module is expected to be completed by June, 2010. Thereafter, 3 million tonnes of capacity will be added every two years. Thus, the plant will reach its full capacity of 12 million tonnes by 2016. The development of road and rail linkages from the mining and coal belts of Orissa to the location of the steel plants and Paradeep port has been accorded very high priority and placed on a fast track. With POSCO's investment in Orissa, there is likelihood of many other medium and large Korean and Indian companies seeking investment opportunities in the ancilliary and downstream industries in the steel sector. The setting up of the steel plant by POSCO is likely to bring in a stream of revenue both to the Central Govt. and to the State Govt. The Central Govt. is likely to benefit to the tune of approx. Rs.89,000 crores over a period of 30 years by way of excise and customs duties, service taxes and corporate income tax. The Govt. of Orissa on the other hand, is likely to benefit to the tune of approx. Rs. 22,500 crores over a period of 30 years by way of sales tax/VAT, works contract tax, electricity duty, royalties, Orissa Infrastructure Tax and share of Central taxes. The entire project including mining, steel plant and port is likely to generate direct employment to the tune of 13,000 persons and indirect employment for 35,000 persons. During the construction stage, it is estimated that POSCO would need more than 18,000 skilled workers (such as carpenters, welders, brick layers, painters, electricians etc.) daily at the peak of construction activity. POSCO will set up a Company registered in India and this Indian Company will set up the integrated steel plant and apply for the mining leases as well as carry out all related operations. The registered Office of this Indian Company will be in Bhubaneswar. To meet the raw material requirements of the project, iron ore will be provided only for captive use of the steel plant to be set up by POSCO in Orissa. For this, 600 million tonnes of iron ore will be made available for captive use which will be adequate to meet the requirements of the steel plant for a period of 30 years.